

Interagency Florida Panther Response Team

Annual Report: 2009-2010

(July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2010)

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

National Park Service

RESPONSE PLAN

An Interagency Florida Panther Response Team (Response Team) was established by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), National Park Service (NPS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in 2004 to respond to human-panther interactions. The Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan (Response Plan) was developed to provide guidelines for responding to these interactions and conflicts. Also included in the plan is an outreach strategy that provides goals and objectives for educating the public. The Response Plan has been the guiding document for the Response Team since February 2005. An Environmental Assessment for the Response Plan was finalized in October 2008.

The Response Plan requires that the Response Team meet at least once a year to review the past year's activities and suggest revisions to the Response Plan, if needed. The results of the annual meeting are provided in a comprehensive report to the Oversight Committee consisting of the FWS Southeast Regional Director, the FWS Project Leader of the Southwest Florida Gulf Coast Refuges, the NPS Southeast Regional Director, the NPS Superintendent of Everglades National Park (ENP), the NPS Superintendent of Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP), and the FWC Executive Director. The Oversight Committee will review and approve revisions to the Response Plan, review actions by the Response Team and provide guidance if warranted.

The Annual Interagency Response Team Meeting was held on November 23, 2010 to review significant human-panther interactions that occurred during the reporting period and discuss/recommend potential Response Plan revisions for the Oversight Committee to consider.

RESPONSE PLAN REVISIONS

No revisions to the response plan were suggested this year.

HUMAN-PANTHER INTERACTIONS AND DEPREDACTIONS

The Response Plan identifies five human-panther interaction classifications: Sighting(s), Encounter, Incident, Threat, and Attack. Panther depredation on domestic animals is addressed separately.

Two human-panther interaction types (sightings, encounters) and panther depredations were recorded during the reporting period (Tables 1, 2). More confirmed depredations and encounters were documented this fiscal year compared to previous years (Fig. 1). An interaction or depredation is confirmed when evidence, examined by experienced personnel knowledgeable in interpreting panther sign, supports a panther was involved. Eleven human-panther interactions and 18 depredation events were reported. Eight (5 encounters, 3 sightings) human-panther interaction and 12 depredations were confirmed to involve panthers. Two additional depredations involved other predators (dog, bobcat). One encounter, 2 sightings, and 4 depredations were unconfirmed due to lack of physical evidence.

Sightings

A sighting is defined as a visual observation or fleeting glimpse of a panther from a distance. Sightings, by their very nature, cannot be substantiated unless the animal leaves some sort of evidence, such as tracks that can be verified by researchers, or a clear photograph is obtained. Therefore, most sighting reports lead simply to an educational opportunity. Sightings generally pose a low risk to human safety

but may become important if repeated sightings occur in the same vicinity. Causes for repeated sightings will be investigated to determine if further management actions are warranted.

Three sightings were confirmed by tracks or photographs within Golden Gate Estates (Table 2). On 30 April, 2010 an adult female with two kittens were observed walking through a back yard on 21st St SW. Track evidence corroborated the observation. On 8 May, 2010 an adult panther was observed walking through front yards along 15th St NW. Track evidence revealed the panther in question was a female. On 19 May, 2010 a homeowner took a photograph of a panther on 17th St SW. The photograph was reviewed by panther biologists at the FWC Naples Field Office and determined to be a male. Figures 2, 6, and 7 shows the locations of the confirmed sightings by panthers.

Encounters

An encounter is an unexpected direct meeting between a human and a panther in which the panther exhibits nonthreatening behavior. Five interactions were classified as a confirmed panther encounter (Table 2). The distinction between a sighting and encounter is sometimes difficult to ascertain. Three of the encounters were prompted more by human actions and not necessarily by the panthers' behavior. These included a jogger that ran after a panther for a better look, observers that got out of a vehicle to photograph and record two panthers on a rural road, and laborers that congregated near a reportedly injured panther in a tree in an orange grove. The other two encounters occurred when a panther reportedly took two steps towards a person after it was photographed and another that was peering into a window presumably fixated on indoor housecats. Figures 6 and 7 show the locations of the confirmed encounters by panthers.

Depredations

A depredation is classified as domestic livestock or pets being preyed upon by a panther. Eighteen depredation events were reported and the type of predator involved was determined in 14 cases. Panthers were confirmed to be responsible in 12 depredation events (Table 1). Other confirmed predators included bobcat and dog. Panthers primarily preyed on goats but a young calf weighing 80 pounds and a house cat were also killed. Based on photographs obtained at depredation sites and proximity of various locations, it is believed that as many as 6 individual panthers were responsible for the 12 depredation events. A female with dependant-aged kittens and an adult male were responsible for 4 events each. The other 4 events were done by different individuals. Figures 2-5 show the locations of the confirmed depredations by panthers.

OUTREACH

The Florida Panther Outreach Working Group, comprised of state and federal government agencies and non-government organizations, was created in 2006 to develop and promote various types of outreach materials based on the Response Plan's Outreach Strategy. Teleconference meetings were held monthly. Several projects are in various stages of development including a Spanish translation for the *A Guide to Living with Florida Panthers* brochure, a rack card handout targeting motorists that are stopped for exceeding speed limits in posted reduced nighttime panther speed zones, and planning a panther festival. Outreach efforts accomplished in the past fiscal year are summarized below.

- The FWC's Florida panther web site (www.floridapanther.net) is regularly updated with information on panther births, mortalities, and pertinent news items.

- The Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge prepare a monthly *Panther Update* newsletter highlighting panther research, management activities and outreach events. Newsletters are available on the Friends of the Panther Refuge website at www.floridapanther.org.
- From February 4-14, 2010 the NPS, FWC and FWS sponsored a “Living with Wildlife” booth at the Collier County Fair. In addition to agency personnel, volunteers and members of the Friends of Florida Panther Refuge helped staff the exhibit, which attracted 800 people.
- During the month of March, a variety of state, federal, and environmental organizations celebrated the 5th annual Florida Panther Week at various venues throughout southwest Florida. Approximately 5,500 people participated in these events. This celebration spanned most of the month of March, starting with the Save the Panther event at Naples Zoo on March 6th, and culminating with Save the Panther Day at Florida Panther NWR on March 20th with a turnout of approximately 200 people.
- NPS and FWC biologists gave a joint presentation at a fundraiser for the Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge in Naples, FL on Florida panthers in Collier County.
- Members of Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge provided several presentations in the local area on Florida panthers during this reporting period.
- Plans were made to distribute information packets to an area of Golden Gate Estates in Collier County where a number of panther depredations were documented. The goal was to educate residents on living safely in panther country with a focus on proper hobby livestock husbandry practices. The actual event was carried out on 10 July, 2010 (after this reporting period). Information packets contained Living with Panther and Living with Bear brochures, instructions on two styles of livestock enclosures, permit requirements, information on the Defenders of Wildlife panther booklet, a Friends of the Panther Refuge bookmark, and a “Florida is Panther Country” magnet. Two-thousand packets were distributed by 40 volunteers from a number of affiliations (FWC, FPNWR, USFWS Vero Beach Field Office, NPS, Defenders of Wildlife, Collier County Sheriff’s Office, Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Florida Wildlife Federation, Naples Zoo, Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge, neighborhood volunteers, and others).

CONCLUSION

More confirmed conflicts were documented during the 2009-2010 fiscal year compared to previous years. There were more confirmed depredations and encounters compared to last fiscal year. Part of the increase in confirmed depredations can be attributed to a female with dependant kittens that utilized the abundant prey base of unprotected hobby livestock in Golden Gate Estates. The Golden Gate Estates and Belle Meade areas offer a semi-rural landscape where large portions of native and exotic vegetation exists, affording panthers adequate cover for travel, hunting, and rest sites. Education continues to be important, especially as it relates to effective animal husbandry techniques, to protect pets and hobby livestock. Securing ones animals also promotes human safety. All interactions provide an education opportunity for living and recreating in areas frequented by panthers.

Table 1. Confirmed panther depredations investigated during fiscal year 1 July 2009 – 30 June 2010. All events occurred within Collier County, Florida. I-75 represents boundary between north and south areas.

Event #	Interaction Date	Location ^a	Animals Depredated	Comments
1	3/6/2010	5465 Stable Way South Belle Meade	Goat	Owner has one female captive cougar that was in heat during time of depredation. Also has male/female pair of lynx. Trail cameras captured male panther at cache site.
2	3/27/2010	2825 Jenkins Way North Belle Meade	Goat	3 goats fatally depredated. Panther entered shed between gap in fence and roof. Tracks of male panther found.
3	4/17/2010	1274 Keri Island Rd North GGE	Goat	2 goats fatally depredated. Buried by owners before investigation but male panther tracks still present at site.
4	4/23/2010	225 17th St SW North GGE	Goat	Notified several days after depredations. 10 goats total; 6 on 4/23/10, 4 on 4/25/10. All goats found on heavily wooded neighboring property. Panther determined based on eating method (ribs chewed) and evidence of previous caching.
5	5/9/2010	Indian Camp Rd Immokalee	Goat	Five goats killed over several days. Male panther identified by track evidence.
6	5/10/2010	1015 Snake Rd South GGE	Goat, cat	Three goats, one cat. Panther tracks observed at site.
7	5/23/2010	2965 Garland Rd North Belle Meade	Goat	Male panther tracks at scene. Goat was attacked but not killed.
8	5/25/2010	275 Morgan Rd South Belle Meade	Calf	Male panther tracks at scene. 80 lb calf.
9	6/1/2010	640 3rd St SW North GGE	Chicken	Five chickens. Female panther tracks observed. Remote cameras captured one female panther.
10	6/5/2010	5465 Stable Way South Belle Meade	Goat	Owner reported 3 goats killed. FWC notified several days afterward so no field investigation. Deemed credible based on owners knowledge and past experience with panther depredations.
11	6/6/2010	120 15th St SW North GGE	Goat	Initial call was to report depredation of 4 goats. Boy encountered panther at about 15 feet while looking for goats. Panther ran off upon boy's approach. Trail cameras captured female and one kitten.
12	6/10/2010	b. North GGE	Goat	Cameras captured adult female and 3 kittens.

a. GGE = Golden Gate Estates

b. Florida Statute Section 119.07(3)(i)(1)(2)(3) provides that certain records pertaining to specified personnel are exempt from the public records law and will not be subject to disclosure except for official business.

Table 2. Confirmed human-panther interactions investigated during fiscal year 1 July 2009 – 30 June 2010. I-75 represents boundary between north and south areas.

Event ID	Interaction Date	Location ^a	Interaction Type	Comments
A	2/8/2010	FPNWR	Encounter	Encountered by FPNWR intern while jogging on refuge. Encounter observed from air by D. Land while getting aerial location of FP171.
B	2/8/2010	FSPSP boardwalk	Encounter	Photographed on boardwalk. Photo and description later sent to FWC.
C	2/21/2010	1520 Blue Sage Dr North Belle Meade	Encounter	Male panther tracks observed at scene corroborate story. Panther peering in through living room window.
D	5/9/2010	HCI Hendry County	Encounter	Two panthers observed on farm road east of the Hendry Correctional Institute. Photographs and audio recordings obtained by observers. One radiocollared, presumed to be FP165 based on collar type (non-functioning).
E	5/18/2010	653 Homestead Rd Immokalee	Encounter	Photographed sitting in orange tree. Reported to be limping. Male panther identified by tracks.
F	4/30/2010	375 21st St North GGE	Sighting	Report of adult with 2 kittens corroborated by track evidence.
G	5/8/2010	141 15th St NW North GGE	Sighting	Female tracks and scat corroborated sighting.
H	5/19/2010	2270 17th St SW North GGE	Sighting	Photo of live panther sent to FWC panther biologists. Confirmed panther, appears to be male.
a. FPNWR = Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge; FSPSP = Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park; GGE = Golden Gate Estates; HCI = Hendry Correctional Institute				

Figure 1. Number of confirmed human-panther conflicts by fiscal year.

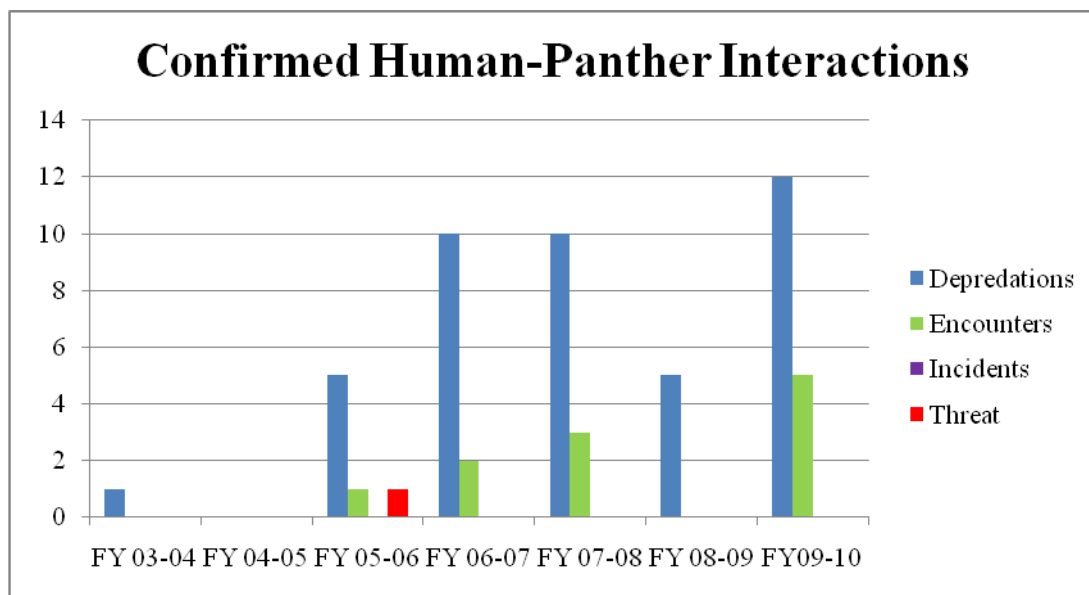
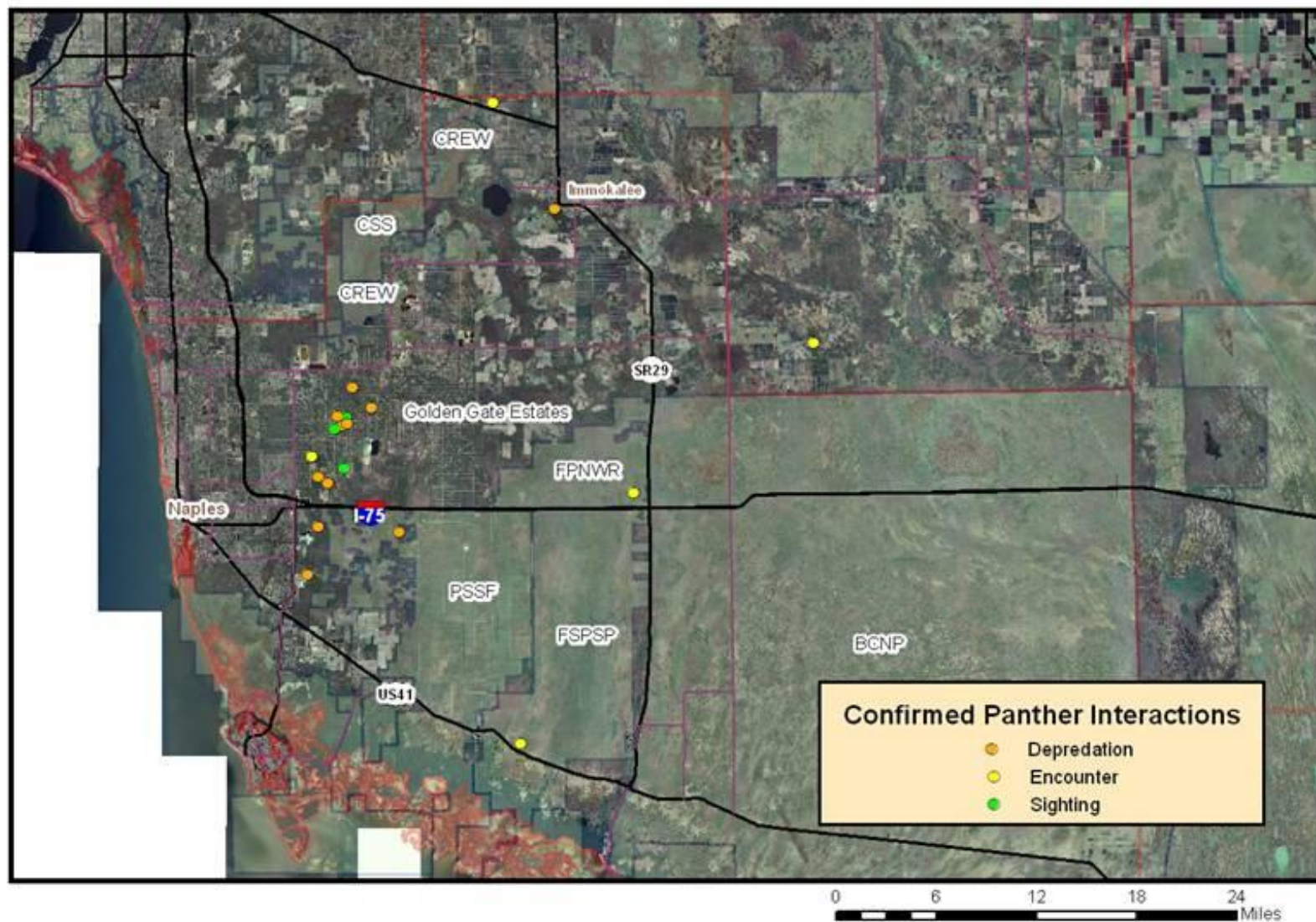
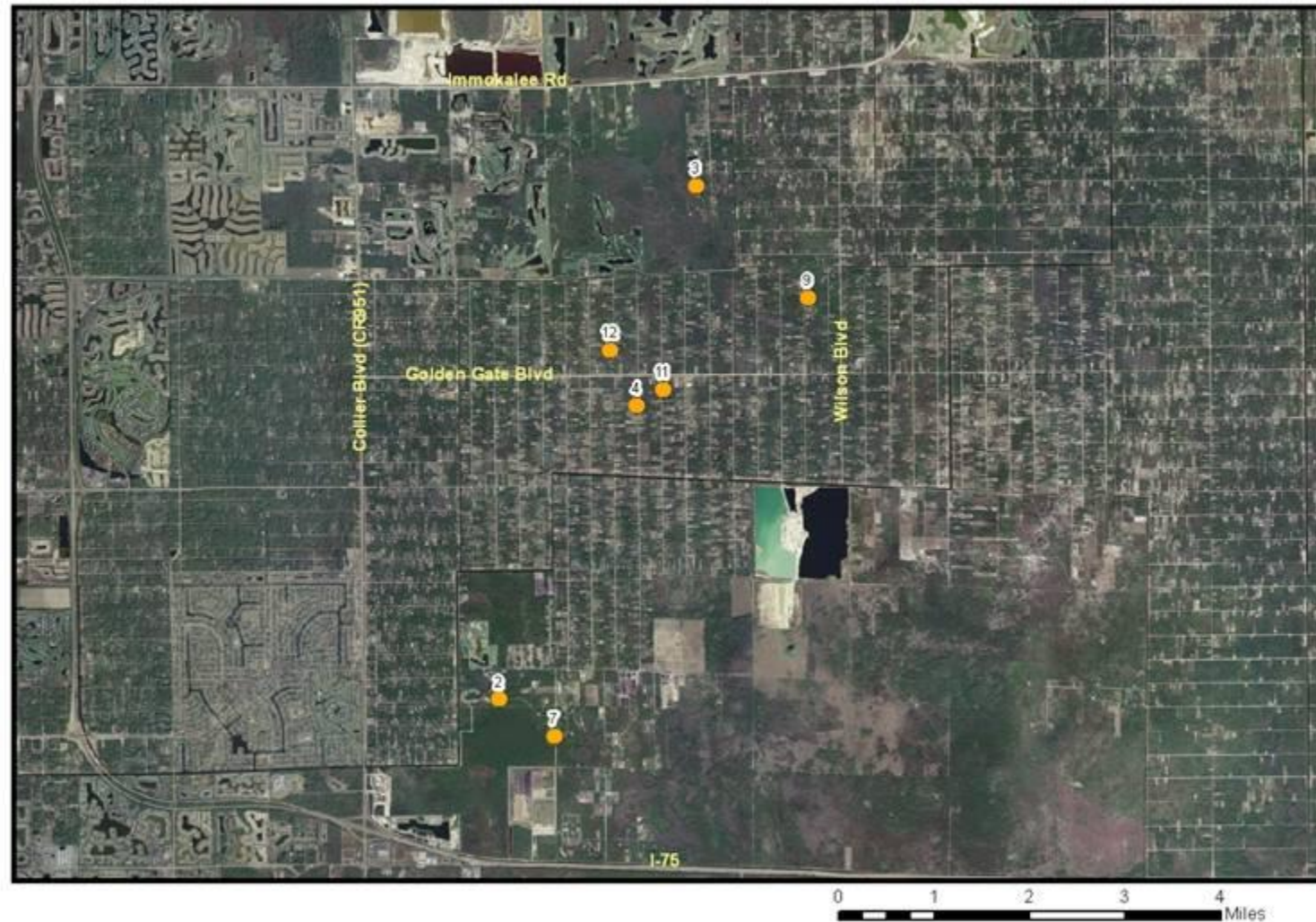
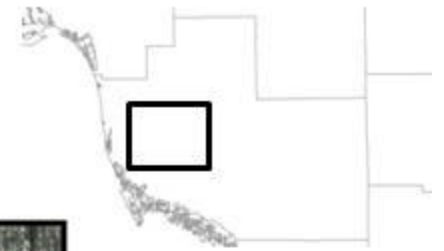


Figure 2. Confirmed panther interaction and depredation locations, fiscal year 2009-2010.



Confirmed panther interactions FY 2009-2010

Figure 3. Confirmed panther depredations in north Golden Gate Estates, fiscal year 2009-2010.



Confirmed panther depredations in North Golden Gate Estates FY 2009-2010

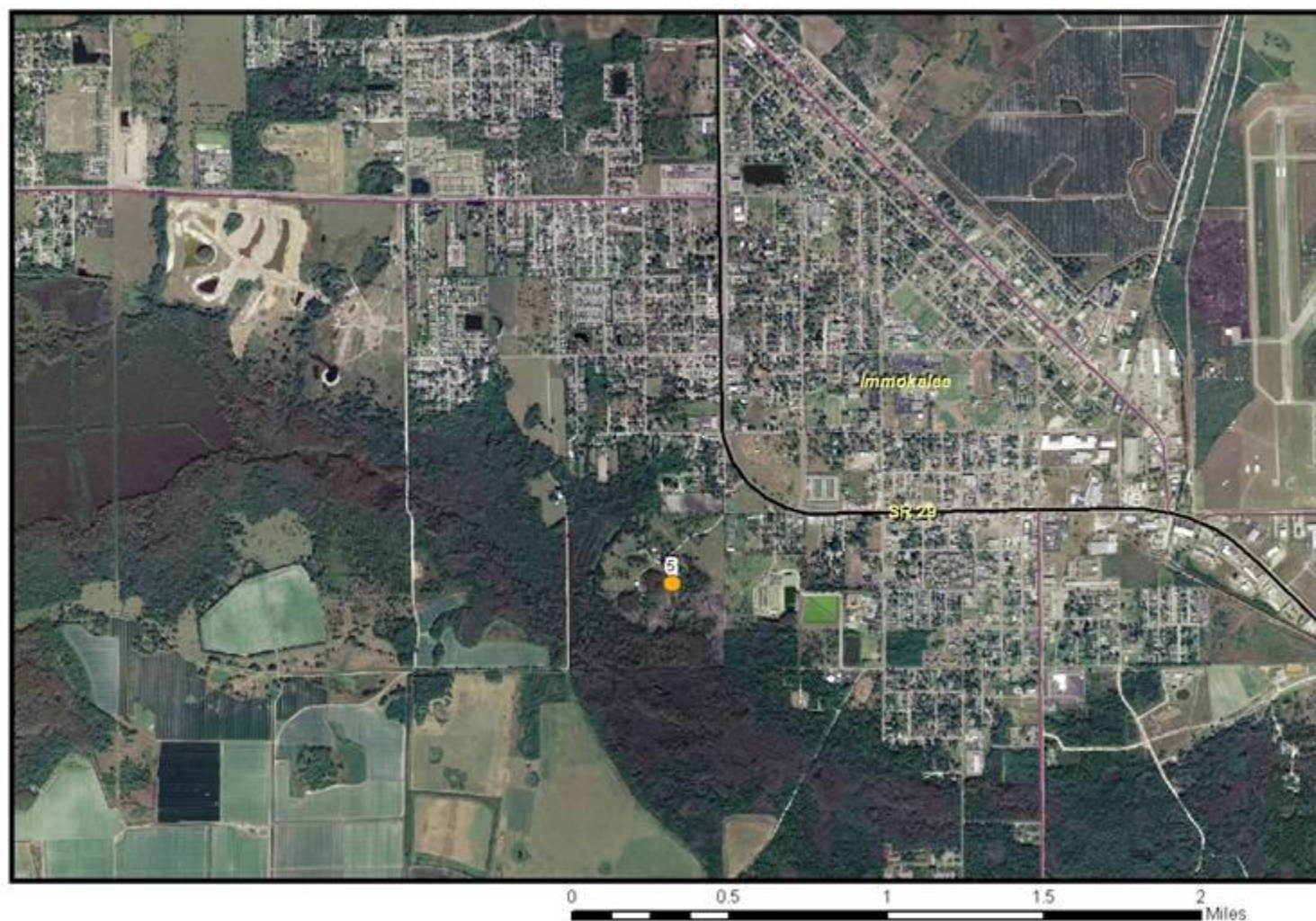
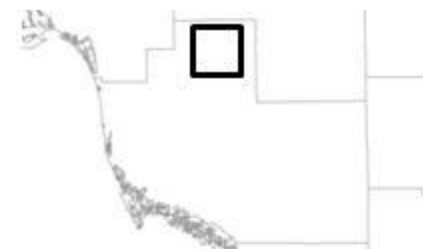


Figure 4. Confirmed panther depredations in south Belle Meade and Golden Gate Estates, fiscal year 2009-2010.



Confirmed panther depredations in South Belle Meade/Golden Gate Estates
FY 2009-2010

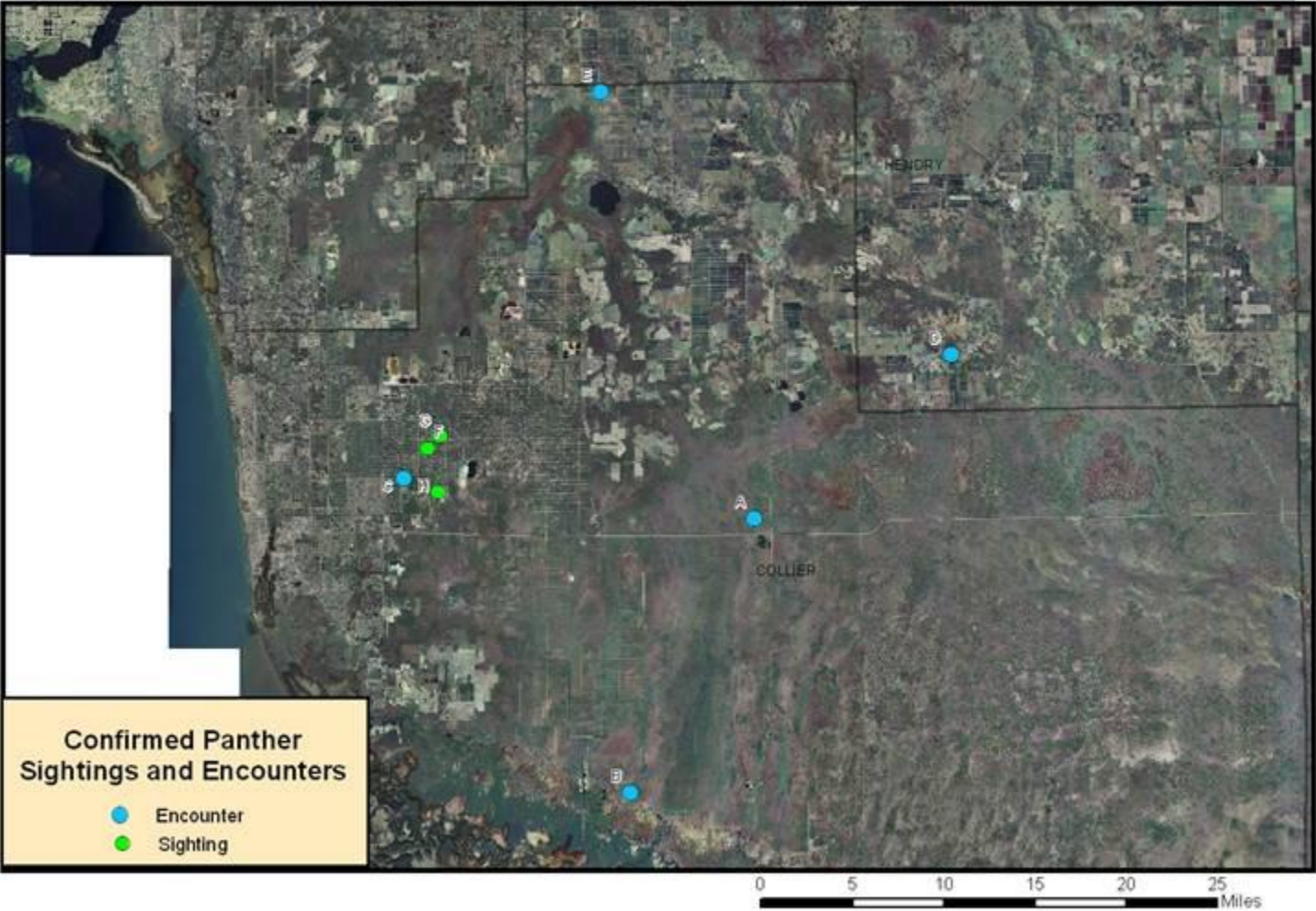
Figure 5. Confirmed panther depredations in Immokalee, fiscal year 2009-2010.



Confirmed panther depredations in Immokalee FY 2009-2010

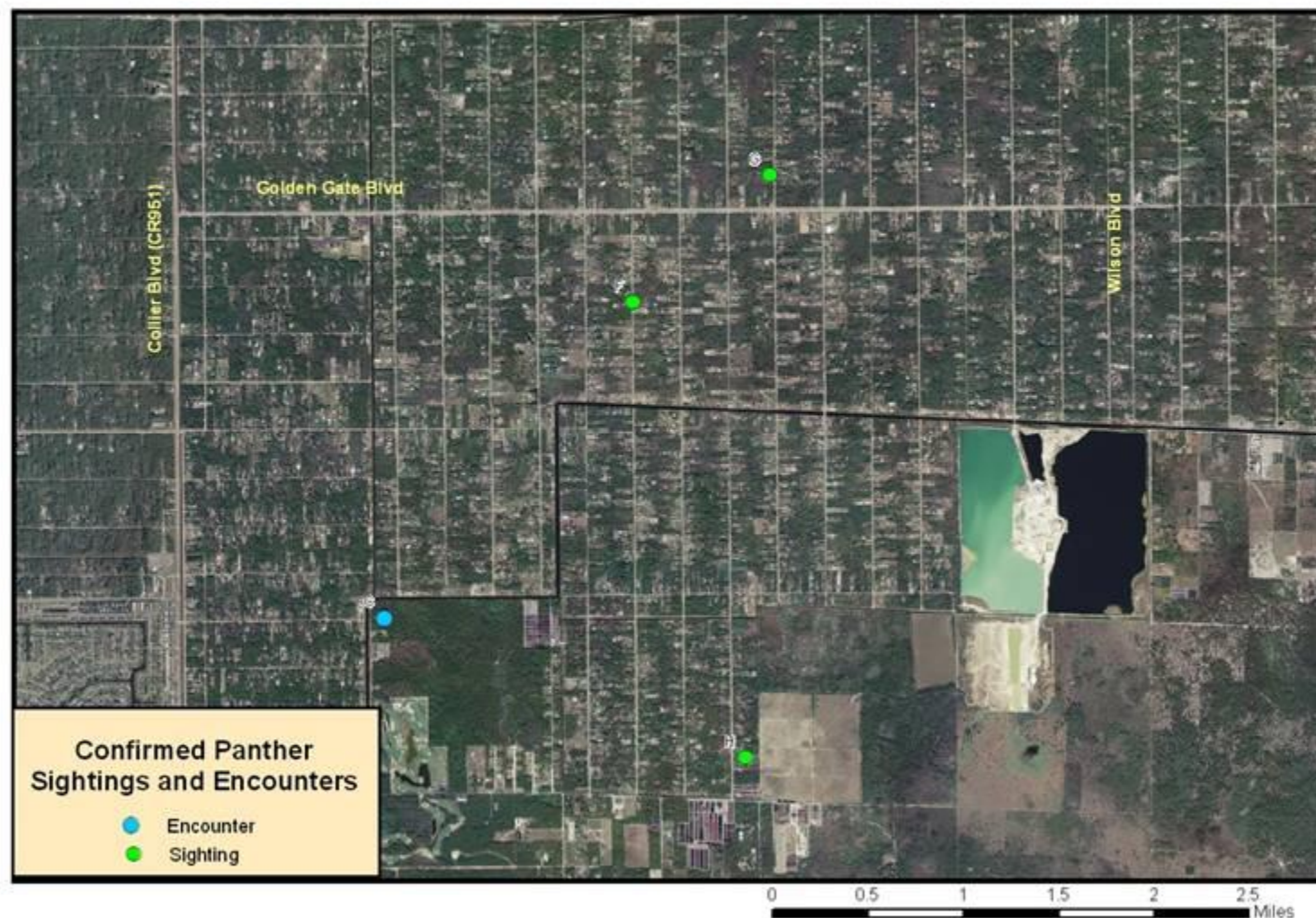
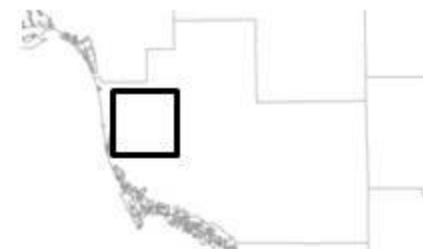


Figure 6. Confirmed panther sightings and encounters, fiscal year 2009-2010.



Confirmed panther sightings and encounters FY 2009-2010

Figure 7. Confirmed panther sightings and encounters in north Golden Gate Estates, fiscal year 2009-2010.



Confirmed panther sightings and encounters FY 2009-2010



Appendix I. Photographic evidence from select sightings, encounters, and depredation events.

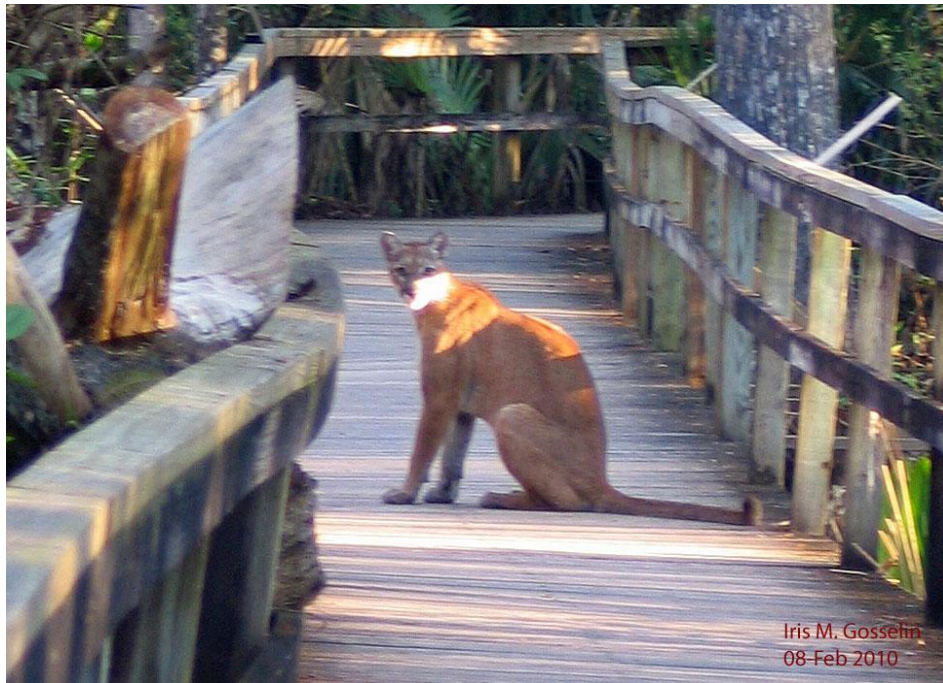


Photo 1. Panther encountered on boardwalk at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, February 8, 2010. Interaction event B.



Photo 2. Panther encountered by irrigation workers in Consolidated Citrus orange grove, May 18, 2010. Interaction event E.



Photo 3. Uncollared male photographed at depredation site on Stable Way, March 6, 2010. Depredation event 1.



Photo 4. Adult female (left) and 3 dependant-aged kittens (right) at depredation site in Golden Gate Estates, June 10, 2010. Kittens are estimated to be about 9-months-old. Depredation event 12.